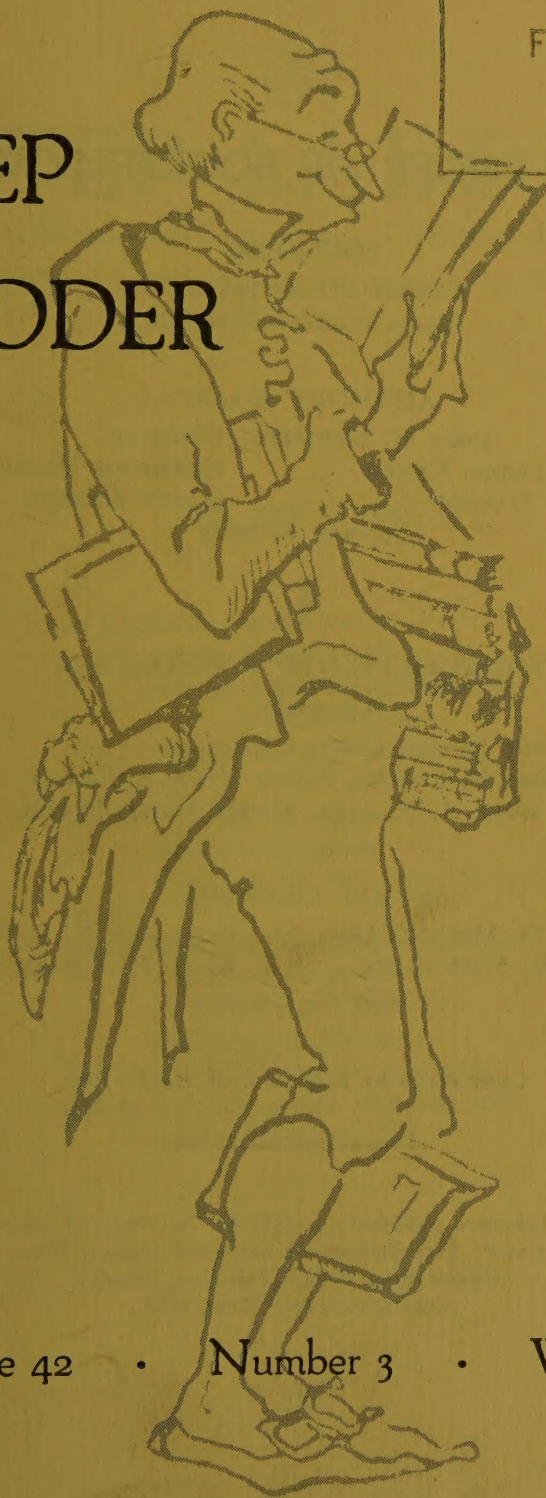


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LADDER

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The STEP LADDER

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WINTER 1959

GALESBURG, ILLINOIS

L. RADSLIFF

ON THE STREET

At a table on the sidewalk —
 a man, drinking coffee
 through a beard which indicates
 his untried youth
 visibly leans above his book,
unreal
beside the proficient negro
 with his wise smile
 who helps me save a pair of shoes.
Nearby
discussing a print, a tolerant Dutchman
 wonders if the child
 for whom it is a gift
 will blend, in her teens
such beauty and such a bearded youth
adding dark young men with wry smiles
 around her coffee table.

THE EPITAPH IS NUMB

Cover her face; Mine eyes dazell: she di'd yong.

I saw her last
In satins shrouding stone.
Her long limbs shone
As Winter pistils
Reminiscing supple music.
The last, at last:
frigid marble
fast to rock.

I saw her last
Pressed like a leaf to loam
Thick with perfume,
A downy swarm
Of petals strewn in monstrous measure
On her wrists,
her gentle form
without a gesture.

Gone from grass
And gone from laughing daughters,
Gone from waters,
Hammered hard
And deeper than a casket nail,
The warmth was past;
the face prepared
but not to smile.

I saw her last:
No lichen on the stones

Nor tendrilous ribbons.
Her then inviolable
Slaking, like exquisite music,
Was far from grass,
 her white loins sterile
 as the rocks.

ICARUS

Flew high and fell.
Beyond labyrinthine hinterlands
In air of seas with gleaming bands,
 he dipped to hell.

A heavy bird
Diving deeper than its wings
Dropped a slap upon the facing
Water's gird;

Flung ashore,
A boy lay melting into sand
While, peeling from his ruddy hands,
The feathers swore,

The quick wind sighed
Away and surf waves spewed their rot
Across his sun-kissed lips. The upshot —
 down he died.

AUTUMNAL PRAYER

I walk by the chapel grown hills.
Cantabile of shades
Directs the way;
A choir of leaves stirs and trills,
Sotto voce, in lively peace.

I hear the thin beaked birds
Peck for their prey;
Peace on the hills, in fire streaked
Days, returns to my heart,
In the crisp, clear lake, doubleloved.

I see the life-run sign in the blood
Of the leaf, in the vein of brown,
Dappled strong with hearts of age,
Mature, yet the child,
Ready to die, in passing hymn.

Feeling the growth of death, the birth
Of decay, feeding
Some unknown bone, my limbs
Become the shades of petaled earth;
I walk steeple-eyed towards the sun.

And when from the shades light creates
A nave, from which I
Offer prayer down the valley of days,
I kneel upon my own flesh and bone
And sing the day to peace with waking love.

POMPEII

Immobile and amazed, these people
sit or stand, lie and kneel,
just as the mad volcano caught them:
that quiet cone there, piled
against the sky.

One roaring morning
was all it took to snap
this solid photograph.

For fifteen-hundred years the negatives
lay under wet and sifting ash,
developing the molds of clay
this plaster was poured into.

Standing here
before these static lives, it nearly seems
Vesuvius had looked
toward Olympus and the fruitful isles
the latter sheltered.

Had seen the art that flowed from Greece
and disdainfully had wrought
its own.

OCTOBER FLIGHT

Like music

I feel the hollow wind
hollowing my ear
and resist the response that calls
for sere leaf, pitfalls,
and fear.

Like music

the leaf tipped
from the topmost bough
glides up! kites in a kiss of air, gracefully tumbles and sto
as the strong wind drops,
but how,

How like a bird

so gracefully it tips
its seven wings and glides
smooth swings of air until it lightly lands
and even more gracefully stands
than its rare and rolling rides.

OCEAN ISLAND

This is the world,
the world that was
at the upheaval
and the inflowing.
Here lies basalt
built into dikes,
large and
wandering to northward;
and small
measured in inches
so that I can
hold a piece
in my hand —
a piece broken off
and polished
by the driven waters
of the many stormings.

This is the world —
basalt and flint
and fossil crinoids
that grew upward
in the early ocean.
When I stand here
on this pebbled beach
I am in the midst
of history,
holding history
in my hands.

THE ROLLERCOASTER

How teasingly it used to tug us
Giggling
Up the slow hill of lights
Up up up
Around the backside of the moon
To one flat instant on a rounded top
Where
Holding breaths about to be sucked clean out of us —
Our cotton-candied stomachs right behind —
We picked our star and grabbed;
But always our twelve-year arm
Proved just a joint too short
(As the brass ring —
Maybe the silver! —
Proffered to the daring riders of the wooden palominos
Never more than scraped our fingernail).
And how it used to send us
Scooting
Down the darkness
Underneath the moon
To a little breathless death
Half a blink before the bottom;
Then the thump,
The rush back in of life,
While across the ripples born out of the walloping wave
We went skimming into the lighted shed
And stopped.

How deliciously like the rollercoaster's
Are the climbs we take together,

My lovely —
 The tantalizing tugs,
 The windless instant
 While lunging and clutching
 For the star bubbling silver forever unobtainable;
 And how precious like the rollercoaster's
 Are the jumps we make together,
 My lovely —
 The dying drop,
 The bump at bottom,
 The life welling back in against all our will,
 And then the ski-ride over the little undulating humps —
 Now one swelling greater than the rest,
 Falling
 Almost enough to snatch the breath again,
 But never quite —
 To the peopled lights and stopped.

When the minx comes along,
 The coiling cat,
 Walking, stalking my way,
 The tremendous-titted trull that sooner or later handles
 the fire of even the hottest lover,
 That's how she'd better take me,
 My lovely —
 A teasing to the top from every muscle in her trip-triggered
 body,
 A breath-holding instant,
 A last wild lunge toward those startling shoots of light
 never to be seen again,
 And then the skid,
 The big breath-taking skid,
 Down the soft warm scoop of her wonderful blackness
 Underneath the moon.

MISS HOFFA'S ROSE GARDEN

And then there is Miss Hoffa's rose garden —
Nine narrow mounds of mold worked raw
No longer than a nine-month infant's grave,
Nine ripening Abyssinian bellies
Floating on an emerald sea —
These are the beds.

And oh the colors!
Nine of them —
From white to yellows, yellows to reds, reds back to white —
I think this is the palette ultimate,
Adam's pigments —
All billiard velvet started in this grass.

And then Miss Hoffa —
You scarcely find the grey eyes
Bonneted beneath a corridor of centuries
When her squat is toward the fence;
Or else, a much bumped billiard ball,
This lump of white tulle shirtwaist,
Rolled across the velvet
Into the rose beds.

At night you see her behind gossamer,
 Framed by oak shutters within the deep-silled window,
 A specter under green eyeshade,
 A straight-backed revenant from a town of dusty streets,
 Harkening to the clop clop clop
 Which echoes through the silent words of that perpetual book
 Her fingers fishhook in the green floating from globes
 Whose light was once the bride of clop clop clopping.

They say she was the beauty of that town,
 And I can see her —
 Though it died before I came —
 High in the buckboard,
 Greys matched to match her eyes,
 Whip winnowing townsmen through her white-gloved fingers,
 Trotting gently down the centuries to this garden
 Where now I see her,
 White-gloved against the thorns,
 Troweling the green with graves forever fresh-earthed,
 With chocolate wombs forever pregnant with her beauties.

Oh, let me rub those petals to my cheek,
 Suck red and white and yellow perfumes into every breath!
 And should Miss Hoffa please to spade a spot for me,
 I'd love to lie among the roses in her garden
 And be her child forever.

ELEGY FOR A PHONOLOGIST WHO DIED AGED FORTY-FOUR

To let them hear the sounds he heard them make,
To make them make the sounds he knew he heard,
Say *saltimbanque* and *seulement* and *surprendre* —
That was his passion.
No Christ or painter clenched the truth more surely in a word
or color
Than this man in his ear.
But oh, no more than any Christ can kindle light in jungle hearts,
Painter can pluck his eye and plunge it in the blind,
No more could her curl ear inside the hair
He daily threatened with a rape for beauty's sake
Or onto skull deaf even to the echoes of its own emptiness.

And so he cursed — but soft —
And prayed and chalked
Until an evening when he stooped to tie
A lace. It seems a foolish way to die.

The just god saw that he made no sound,
He rose up gently and fluttered down,
And the chalk was still on his fingers.

When I remember Jacques Rivoire
Then I know for real that hell is a siren
Undulating its forever instant of begin and end
Through the now of perpetual night,
And heaven — heaven is just the just word justly breathed
Across an eternal silence.

RUMMAGE SALE

Here the bedraggled are
 blest,
The nearly-new fondled
To vicarious gentility;
Elegantly the weary are
 reborn;
These disowned
Leap their shabby inferences:
The limp clown of a dress
Spread-eagled on the wall
May yet dance with seraphim;
A boy's dearest strategies
Await the echo of a battered
 drum.

PLANETARIUM

A harmonious universe
Sweeps beneath this dome
In preconceived intention;
Wind-surge and imagery
Betray earth to insignificance,
While sterile moon and I
Brace against the craggy slope
Of a special loneliness
Only satellites can know.

HOW THE BIG THING STARTED

The net held all that it could hold.
The sun on Galilee
Was like a blazing arc of gold,
With gold light on the sea.

And Simon brought the haul to view
With Andrew's help. The sky
Spread out its billion miles of blue,
With white clouds rolling by.

The fishes made the netting writhe
In grey and green. The reach
Of rippled water, blue and blithe,
Broke lightly on the beach.

And Simon smiled at Andrew. They
Pulled in the haul to ship.
A quick breeze came and shook the day,
And made the water skip.

A man appeared upon the sand.
A strangeness overspread
That sun, that day, that sea, that land.
And "Follow me," He said.

AT A POINT IN TIME AND SPACE

Quite suddenly I saw the topaz cloud,
And from it thunder breathing hot and loud,

And lightning, metal lightning, dot on dot,
Stippling and stenciling the polyglot
Clouds of the heavens, where the apricot

Cumulo-nimbus vapors formed a crowd
Of phantomed travelers underneath the bowed

Curve of the higher air. The sun was not
Hotter than space-skin when the moon is hot.
There was a voice that spoke, and I forgot

The menace of horsemen; the fear of the shroud;
Fear of the terror practiced by the proud.

Far is the coalsack. Far is that spot
That shows where black chaos poured out of its pot,
That shows where black evil flowed its bloody clot.

There could the dragon bleed. There, beetle-browed,
Could mutter the Mammon Man, stripped, disendowed.

ALL EQUAL ARE

There is a moment when mind
empties of time, and then
all that is or has been
or will be are the same, defined
without reference to history
or to the sequence of years.
The aggregate appears
side by side with debris
of the aggregate; and no
wonder at it at all.

There is no recall
of where the embryo
stands in relation to
the issue of it; ends weigh
like beginnings and who can say
that is old, or this is new?
Nothing joins opposites
or things similar;
near is no closer than far
and finites and infinites
all equal are.

Then things of time and space
are toys a child might drop
upon a table top,
or symbols an artist might place
on a canvas in modern mood,
each figure separate,
detached, seeming to state
no meaning or attitude.

Primordial mists are one
with present rain or a toad
or a man or a concrete road
or long hot rays of the sun.
Leaf and tree diverge
from each other and from the sky
and all of them part with the eye
or, as haphazardly, merge.

Till the conscious itself is caught
between being and not being,
between seeing all and not seeing
and comprehending all, or naught;
and, like a swimmer, going down,
must repudiate the sea,
rediscover some narrow quay
and latch onto it, or drown.

WITH THE MORNING

Went walking with the morning,
Down the dune road with the morning,
Saw sun plumes above the dune-hidden sea,
And a great court of birds
Meeting in the bay hall of mirrors,
Heard gulls cry the bay,
Cormorants take off in torch-voiced flight,
Stir of wild things in the reeds,
Sea shout across bay whisper,
Saw swans in mirror glide,
A crane long-leg a sailboat
Looked up to necklace flight of geese,
Here below a sea-horse
Tiny as a violet in a water glass

I FLY

I fly my kite
Dark fly
Red kite I know

But cannot see
 Feel the tug of it
 Careening wilding
 Tie its cord to a storm fence
 Walk up the beach
 I know is sand
 By waves ghosting white
 Look back
 To where I know it is
 Think I see its tail
 White twinkle

Far down the strand
 Can it be
 A kite flying low
 Flying red
 Red flying the dark
 I fall up
 Small cliffs of sand
 Toward the other kite
 That reds through dark
 Why it's the moon
 Reddening its way to green gold
 The two kites
 Three kites fly
 Dark kite red moon and me

ICE CREAM PARLOR

In this cool cave
white marble-topped tables
are encircled by iron chairs
entwined with hearts and flowers.
Chandeliers reflected in pier glass,
coy pink cupids
festoon an azure ceiling.
Beside the sharp hiss of the soda fountain
important secrets are exchanged,
straws dipped in sweet communion.

LIBORIA E. ROMANO

TO MATTHEW ARNOLD

Sir, the sea was rough tonight,
its monstrous fingers hurled
death upon our shore,
and tremulous small hands
cupped fears, and tears
poured from a human face
straining at a window pane,
alone.

THROUGH THE THICKET

The hand shuffles remembrances,
Holds them to the light:
The years fall away,
The eyes take on luster,
The limbs find speed.
And the pulse races toward
The bright visage sunbeaming
The woods of long ago.

Moment-long age moves
With the image through
The thicket of now.

WEATHER METABOLISM

This fog undays the defenseless day,
Blots out tallness of sky,
Chills the song embryo
Within me
The tree-tears of dampened leaves
Lie listless at
The wet weather feet:
Cold song is
My portion
For this day.

MARY DRAGONETTI

ELECTED

Only the rose
Is articulate with spines.

Only the rain
Has all the colors of sound.

Only the moon
Is pure enhancement.

Only the bone
Has implicit discipline.

Only the bone.

NORMAN NATHAN

BLUEPRINT FOR A SINNER

He disgorges food before he eats,
Grows green when others smile,
Pales to their laughter;
Lemon sucks at his lips refusing sweets
Which taste like guile.

But let new roses bloom — praised — thereafter
The odor sickens him; for him cactus flowers
Frail in a crazed bowl;
The connoisseur is shown thus; knife judgment from a rafter
Cuts down all towers.

Clear brittle glass, sharp only when not whole,
Chipped good, cracked best,
Where greatly not to enjoy is the goal
Scratching at zest.

PETER SPIELBERG

DAS LEBEN VERPAZT MIR DEN APETIT

when thoughts become more
than the act
and the thick skin needs
pornography

will not
man's love of woman's flesh
prove incest
 (in the strictest sense)?
and the sweetened limbs
when digested
all saccharine (in the past tense)
Das Leben verpazt mir den Appetit.

IN THE GINKGO

The Ginkgo, tree of life
With small-breath leaves
In light October gold,
Has a red streak-blossom,
The Cardinal.

Up, down, from tip
To lowest bough, flies
The unpluckable flower
In the oldest tree.

High in the Eden yellow,
This beauty! scarlet spirit
Guiltless, without hate.

WILLIS EBERMAN

ANTIQUE SONG.

You are like a blond flower burning,
you are so fair;
like a young leaf, clean and turning,
in the bright air.

I have plucked at root and petal;
forgive me now,
as you go through fire and metal.
My heart, the plough

ticked at the root of you; above,
my hand trembled.
I swear that flower I truly love,
to all assembled.

CHARLES SHAW

OF ONCE

At night the wind
sang poems to the stars
and the birds clapped their wings
and laughed

and the trees
told a whirl
of gladness
and spread enraptured arms

for peace
hung in the heavens
and the sky
was the color of love.

OSTIA

Remember the sable sand
At Ostia, wet and metallic,

From what dark rocks
Was it ground? Only yesterday

Roman standards shone
High in the cobalt sky

Against which bronze shoulders
Of fishermen now glow,

Through shallows they wade
Drawing in their nets —

We too are drawn in like silver fish
In nets of eternity.

BICYCLE TO BEFORE

That clover sweet, dew sparkle, wild canary day
 We rode again southeastward to the lake,
 Saying, "The Williams farm was here" and "Do you remember
 We'd rest beneath this bridge? Remember how our feet
 Felt on the dusty road?" Then we would walk
 A hill before re-mounting — decades down,
 Recalling beech trees on the ridge above the lake, and talk
 Of wrens and meadowlark and robin, and of waves
 Rippling the whole night through, "Let go. . . . Let go. . . ."

It would be cool among the reeds, and in jade green
 Hepatica and windflower leaves would lace-like grow
 Beside the spring while, no two hands alike,
 The mittened sassafras clapped plays unseen.
 This green, birdsong, wave lapping world we used to know,
 Recalled with mint-sweet joy, had still the power to shake
 Our hearts approaching it. How easy now to break
 The old taboo — admitting to the unreluctant ear
 Our Eden's rattled warning, sounding loud and clear.

FORTUNETELLER

The heavy touch of paste jewels
and the rustling rub of old damask
barely border on our minds as we enter here.
A gnome, aged beyond age,
whose eyes claim to have seen Atlantis,
to have fondled Cleopatra's pearls,
offers for a dollar secrets unknown
even to Rosicrucians.
And we, taking our cue from her,
bend and believe ourselves
hovering over the mind of God
as she caresses and brings
to life her crystal ball.
We wait to see the whole of time
draw down to a keyhole; and she
listens mute and ageless to old demands,
gives familiar answers to familiar questions,
and still unsmiling, sees us out.

THE SOAP-BUBBLE

He blew a bubble of suds and called it a world,
And draped it with evanescent clouds, and twirled
It slowly till he saw reflected there
The sky, the air,
And all the garden's verdant vicinage
Complete with the hedge and the house and the small garage,
And even the young persimmon tree. . . . He grinned,
Aware he had sinned;
This game was not on his agenda now.

He wondered how
A man would look imprisoned in the bowl,
And turned it around again and caught one, whole.

And now, advancing with a sharpened stick,
The man must prick
The bubble. . . . So, he thought, they know my will;
But always they ignore the codicil.

Contributors

We are particularly pleased to be printing in this issue the work of four young poets, all students at the University of Connecticut, whose poetry seems to us very promising. *James Scully*, 21, is a senior in English and won the Fine Arts Festival prize for poetry at the University last spring. *Morton Felix* is 23 and a graduate student in psychology. *Lewis Turco*, 24, is a senior in English. He has served four years in the Navy and has had poetry recently accepted by *The Sewanee Review*, *The Colorado Quarterly*, and *New Campus Writing*. Two of his poems appeared in the last issue of *THE STEP LADDER*. *Alexander Taylor*, 27, is a graduate student in English at the University and teaches in the Edwin O. Smith School in Storrs. He is the founder and former editor of *Patterns*, a poetry magazine, and has had his poems printed in *Botteghe Oscure* and other magazines.

Rachel Graham has taught biology at Mt. Holyoke, Barnard, and De Pauw. Since she began writing poetry seven years ago, she has been very widely published. *J. S. Wheatcroft* teaches at Bucknell and has previously published in *The Bucknell Review* and *The Bucknell Alumnus*. He is completing a dissertation on Emily Dickinson. *Helen Harrington* is Editor of *Caravan*, a poetry magazine, and has had her poetry and fiction widely published. *Emilie Glen* is a young mother who has had poems and short stories in *The University of Kansas City Review*, *New Directions* 14, *Best American Short Stories* for 1952, and elsewhere. *Jane Beverlin Tate* lives in Roanoke, Virginia, and has contributed widely to periodicals in this country and Canada. Her third volume of poetry, *One Long Summer*, was published a year ago by Bookman Associates.

Hava Krascoff immigrated to this country from Czarist Russia at the age of 17. She learned English in the local high school adult education program, and has been a factory worker all her life. She began publishing verse in the official organ of the Garment Workers Union and has since published in several poetry magazines.

Norman Nathan teaches Shakespeare and poetry at Utica College of Syracuse University, where he has a weekly television lecture series on Shakespeare. His poetry has appeared in *The University of Kansas City Review* and elsewhere. *Peter Spielberg*,

29, was born in Vienna, and is now a graduate student at the University of Buffalo, where he is working on the James Joyce manuscripts in the Lockwood Memorial Library collection. He has recently completed a novel, "The Way of Hundsturm Platz." *Livingston Welch* is Chairman of the Psychology Department at Hunter College, and a sculptor with six exhibits. He has studied poetry with Louise Bogan for four years and has had poetry in several little magazines. *Willis Eberman* lives in Portland, Oregon. He has published widely in poetry magazines; we have recently seen his work in *The Beloit Poetry Journal* and *The Prairie Schooner*. His fourth volume of poetry, *The Pioneers, and Other Poems*, has just come off the press this January.

Charles Shaw is an abstract artist with work in The Metropolitan Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, and many other museums and private collections. His poems have appeared in *The Literary Review*, *Shenandoah*, and other magazines. *Virginia Scott Miner* has had poems and articles in *The Saturday Review* and other magazines, has been Poetry Leader of the Kansas University Writers Conference for the past two years, and teaches English at Pembroke-County Day School in Kansas. *H. Wayne Morgan* is 24 and an historian at the University of California at Los Angeles. *Evelyn Tooley Hunt* is a wife and grandmother in western New York State, who has published widely in the little magazines.

Announcements

It is with genuine regret and a sense of real loss that the Trustees of the Bookfellows Foundation announce the resignation of Benjamin B. Richards as Editor of *THE STEP LADDER*. He leaves the magazine because he is leaving his post as Librarian at Knox College to become Librarian and Professor of Library Science at Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas. He has been a most excellent editor and friend, and we wish him well in his new position.

The new Editor, replacing Mr. Richards, is Samuel Moon. He was born in Detroit. His undergraduate work at the University of Michigan was cut short by the war, but he returned to Michigan after the interruption to complete his graduate studies in the field of American poetry. He has been a teacher of writing in the English Department at Knox College for the past five years.

Table of Contents

L. Radsliff	1	. . . . . On the Street
James Scully	2	. . . . . The Epitaph Is Numbered
	3	. . . . . Ice Cream Parlors
Morton Felix	4	. . . . . Autumnal Prayer
Lewis Turco	5	. . . . . Pompeii
Alexander Taylor	6	. . . . . October Flight
Rachel Graham	7	. . . . . Ocean Island
J. S. Wheatcroft	8	. . . . . The Roller Coaster
	10	. . . . . Miss Hoffa's Rose Garden
	12	. . . . . Elegy for a Phonologist Who
		. . . . . Died Aged Forty-Four
Sylvia Don Raiken	13	. . . . . Rummage Sale
	13	. . . . . Planetarium
Samuel M. Sargent	14	. . . . . How the Big Thing Started
	15	. . . . . At a Point in Time and Space
Helen Harrington	16	. . . . . All Equal A
Emilie Glen	18	. . . . . With the Morning
	18	. . . . . I F
Jane Beverlin Tate	20	. . . . . Ice Cream Parl
Liboria E. Romano	20	. . . . . To Matthew Arno
Hava Krascoff	21	. . . . . Through the Thick
	21	. . . . . Weather Metabolis
Mary Dragonetti	22	. . . . . Elect
Norman Nathan	22	. . . . . Blueprint for a Sin
Peter Spielberg	23	. . . . . Das Leben Verpazt Mir Den Ape
Livingston Welch	24	. . . . . In the Gink
Willis Eberman	24	. . . . . Antique So
Charles Shaw	25	. . . . . Of On
Katherine Thayer Hobson	26	. . . . . Ost
Virginia Scott Miner	27	. . . . . Bicycle to Befo
H. Wayne Morgan	28	. . . . . Fortunetell
Evelyn Tooley Hunt	29	. . . . . The Soap-Bubb
	30	. . . . . Notes on Contributo
	31	. . . . . Announcemen

